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updated Monday, November 27, 2006



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Adoption Day: 2 new beginnings.

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Wednesday, November 22, 2006 12:14 PM EST

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As 8-month-old Laney happily giggled in the arms of her newly adopted parents, she had no idea the importance of the ceremony she'd just gone through. Or just what the certificate laid in front of her would mean for her.

Her new parents, Richard Backus and Carol Johnston of Harbor Springs, knew just what this day, her adoption day, meant. They had been waiting for this day for a long time.



As Judge Fred Mulhauser (from left) unites their hands, making them a "forever family," Carol Johnston, Richard Backus and their newly adopted daughter, 8-month-old Laney, are nothing but smiles. The Harbor Springs couple adopted Laney on Tuesday, Michigan Adoption Day.

"You go through adoption classes and you hear this day will come," Johnston said, a smile spreading across her face. "It's pretty fun to celebrate this little one."

Laney's official declaration of adoption was one of several made Tuesday by Judge Fred Mulhauser in Petoskey as part of Michigan Adoption Day, the largest adoption day in the nation with hundreds of adoptions being finalized and celebrated throughout Michigan.

But being Laney's parents isn't anything new for Johnston and Backus, who have cared for her since the day she was born, March 10, 2006. As part of an open adoption process, the couple was able to be a part of Laney's life from the start.

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"It was so exciting (being a part of her birth). It was just so amazing to see her for the first time," Backus recalled.

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Since then, the joy they both felt has only continued to blossom as they've watched Laney grow and begin to develop into the person she will become. Like all parents, they've worked hard to soothe her tears. They've lived for those chubby-cheeked smiles that melt their hearts. And all the while, they're thankful for the gift they've been given.

"Laney's been just amazing," Johnston said, a motherly glow of happiness oozing off of her as she looked at her daughter.

That glow of happiness could also be seen on the face of 13-year-old Cody and his newly adoptive parents, his grandparents Walter and June Sifford of Alanson. For them, adoption day was a celebration of family being united as family ... again.

Cody said it was hard to express exactly what being adopted meant to him. As his thought, he simply said "more love." It means "more love" to go around and "more love" to count on in his life.

The smile he wore throughout the day said it all.

For Walter and June, adopting their grandson was more than just a celebration of family love. It also means being parents for a second time around. Both said they wouldn't have it any other way.

"Everything that's possible for him to have he's going to have," June said with determination, describing her grandson as someone who deserves nothing but the best. "He's a very caring person. He has a big heart."

Walter said that although it's hard being parents again after 27 years, having Cody in his home, being able to spend time with him, makes it worthwhile.

"He's a good kid. He's fun to be around," he said. "We've always loved him."



Along with the special celebrations Tuesday, Gov. Jennifer Granholm has proclaimed November as Adoption Month in Michigan. There are more than 6,100 children whose birth parents' rights have been terminated. About 4,400 of these children have adoption as part of the child's permanency plan. Many of them have special needs as the result of physical, mental or emotional impairments. Many children who are waiting for a family are older, members of minorities, or have siblings. In fiscal year 2005, 2,883 children with special needs were adopted.

For more information about adoption, visit www.michigan.gov/dhs.

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